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Latino Caucus Staff Retreat: Our History & Our Future



The setting was the historical Grand Island Mansion located on the delta, near Walnut Grove. The spectacular Italian Renaissance style villa is the largest private estate in Northern California and embodies the finest features of classical architecture and European craftsmanship. The intimate setting could not have been better for Latino Caucus Members' staff to form collegial relationships with one another at our annual staff retreat. The goals of this event are to inspire Latino Caucus Members' staff and to establish connections with one another to facilitate good working relationships within the building.

Former Assembly Member Richard Alatorre, the first Chair of the then "Chicano Caucus" which boasted a membership of five Chicano Members, provided staff a brief history of his time in the Legislature. He spoke of the humble beginnings of the Caucus and the important role staff plays in the development and implementation of Caucus goals. "Most of the ideas come from people like you, the staff. Even the concept of forming a Chicano Caucus was an idea from my staff." Alatorre also shared his concept of the 5% rule that he feels contributed to the success of the Chicano Caucus agenda during his tenure in the Legislature. This 5% rule is the notion that all Latinos have 5% of their values that should not be compromised whatsoever; the other 95% are more fluid and can be influenced by different factors. This concept resonated with staff because they fully understand the complexities of working for Legislators from conservative and liberal districts, which

sometimes influence their votes on key issues.

Senator Richard G. Polanco followed Assembly Member Alatorre and also discussed the importance of staff for Latino Caucus Member's, as he too was once staff for Assembly Member Alatorre. Senator Polanco is credited with the huge increase in Latino Caucus membership during his tenure as Chair of the Latino Caucus, which increased from 7 to 24 Latino Legislators at the end of his 12th year as Chair.

Wrapping up the retreat were Andres Jimenez and Alex Franco, who introduced the University of California's California Program on Opportunity and Equity (CalPOE) and the many research opportunities available to staff through it. That presentation was followed by a discussion section that allowed staff to provide feedback about the success of the Caucus and set goals for the Latino Caucus that they will help accomplish. New ideas ranged from hosting Latino Caucus town hall meetings to having a "Hot List" of events and bills sent out using social networking sites and email blasts, in order to keep our large Latino constituency informed about issues important to our community.

The successful staff retreat is a staple event for the Latino Caucus that realizes a respected and well-connected staff leads to efficient and effective policy making. The historical perspective provided by Alatorre and Polanco provided staff the history behind the success of the Caucus and showed them the struggle it took to get the Caucus to where it is today. "I would have loved to have been a Legislator at a time when we had 26 Latino Caucus Members," said Alatorre. Alatorre and Polanco stressed the 5% rule, knowing that the strength of the Caucus lies not simply on large numbers, but on the unity of the Member's. Those 5% will be the issues that unite the Latino Caucus and will continue to make it a force within the Legislature.

Cesar Chavez Cristo Rey Reception

Although the statute of Christopher Columbus' last plea to Queen Isabella was the centerpiece of the reception, the true stars of the night were the students of Cristo Rey High School. On the eve of Cesar Chavez Day, the Latino Caucus held a reception on the first floor rotunda of the State Capitol to honor the legacy of Cesar Chavez and to bring awareness to the great work Cristo Rey High School Sacramento does in molding its students into great leaders.

The Cesar Chavez Cristo Rey Reception was hosted by Assembly Member Tony Mendoza, Vice Chair of the Latino Caucus. Legislators, staff, and community leaders were all present to enjoy the celebration. Paul Chavez, grandson of the late Cesar E. Chavez, addressed the crowd about the great feats his grandfather accomplished and the legacy he left behind. David Brown, director of the Cristo Rey High School work study program, then provided a brief description of the program.

Cristo Rey High School provides a rigorous college preparatory education for students with limited financial means. Students participate in a unique corporate work-study program where they work five days a month in an entry-level corporate job. In doing so, students learn valuable skills within Sacramento's workforce and interact with adults who demonstrate the importance of a college education and strong work ethic.

To further exemplify the success of Cristo Rey, David Brown introduced Nick Ramirez, a Cristo Rey student who spoke eloquently about the positive impact the corporate work study program has had in his life. Learning the day-to-day details of the professional world and what is expected in the world of employment, Nick also learned to take initiative and fully understand his own leadership capabilities.

For more information on Cristo Rey High School: <http://www.cristoreysacramento.org/>

Ambassador Don Alejandro Cirilo Perez Oxlej



The head of the National Maya Council of Elders of Guatemala, Day Keeper of the Mayan Calendar, a 13th generation Quiche Mayan High Priest, a Grand Elder of the Continental Council of Elders & Spiritual Guides of the Americas, an international lecturer on

Mayan culture: these can all be used to describe the honored guest the Latino Caucus welcomed in Sacramento on April 20, 2009. His Mayan name is Wakatel Utiw, Wandering Wolf, and he is the voice of the forest and messenger of the Mayan people.

Hailing from Guatemala, Ambassador Alejandro presented Norma Torres, the first Latino Caucus Member of Guatemalan descent, a memento during a special ceremony that took place at Sacramento State University. The honor of having one of our own Legislators recognized is of great importance to the Latino Caucus. As we trace back our indigenous roots, we must recognize the important role indigenous people played in the development of our world.

The Ancient Maya occupied a vast geographic area in Central and South America from 2000 BC until 1500 AD. The Mayan culture extended to parts of what is now Mexico, Honduras, and El Salvador, and most of Guatemala and Belize. During the Classical Period, which lasted from the 3rd to the 9th century, Maya civilization built awe-inspiring temples, pyramids and cities and formed a complex social and political order. Today descendants of the old Maya account for more than 50% of the Guatemalan population. Their present culture is vibrant and thriving, best shown by the many traditionally dressed woman and children seen along the streets of Guatemala.

Ambassador Alejandro is one of many individuals keeping the Mayan traditions alive. "We the Elders don't think about ourselves, we think about the young ones and the future generations," says the Mayan Ambassador. The Latino Caucus, in the same respect, values tradition and the growth of our most precious resource, our children. Through the visit, we will continue to facilitate greater understanding amongst our cultures.

Pictures



Latino Caucus Vice Chairman Mendoza presents ACR 3 on the Assembly Floor, commemorating Cesar Chavez Day



Vice Chairman Mendoza presents Arturo Chavez, grandson of Cesar Chavez, a gift on behalf of the Caucus



Latino Caucus Member's at the Cesar Chavez Cristo Rey Reception



Cristo Rey High School Students



Cristo Rey student, Nick Ramirez, addresses attendees of the Reception

Upcoming
Events

Mon, May 4th

Latino Spirit Awards
State Capitol,
Assembly Floor
11:00 am - 12:00 pm

Mon, May 4th

LSA Honorees
Press Availability
State Capitol,
2nd Floor Rotunda
12:00 pm – 12:30 pm

Mon, May 4th

Latino Heritage
Celebration
State Capitol
North Steps
5:00 pm – 7:30 pm

Thurs, May 13th

Latino Leaders
Reception in San Jose
Mexican Heritage
Plaza - 5:30 pm to
7:00 pm

Wed, May 20th

Event for Central
Valley & Central
Coast Food Banks
CSAC Conference
Center
5:00 pm to 7:00 pm

Fri, May 22nd

Latino Leaders
Reception in Salinas
National Steinbeck
Center
5:30 pm to 7:00 pm

2009 Priority Bill Highlights

Last month our newsletter introduced the 2009 California Latino Legislative Caucus priority bills. This month we will highlight three additional bills that will have an impact on the Latino Community. AB 1130, introduced by Assemblymember Jose Solorio will change California's Academic Performance Index (API) in order to give a true reflection of the progress that disadvantaged schools are making. SB 603, introduced by Senator Alex Padilla will address the number of tobacco licenses distributed, in an effort to prevent blight and tobacco use in our communities. Finally, SB 194 introduced by Senator Dean Florez will ensure disadvantaged unincorporated communities, which are often Latino, have access to infrastructure funding.

AB 1130 by Assembly Member Solorio would require an advisory committee to the Superintendent of Public Instruction and State Board of Education to consider, and include among its recommendations, a measure of student achievement growth by cohort to provide a more accurate measure of a school's academic growth over time. This bill will essentially help us measure how well schools with large proportions of disadvantaged students are tackling achievement gaps, and tell parents, educators and policy makers if real progress is being made. Measuring growth identifies the true needs of our students, acknowledges the hard work of educators and students across California, and facilitates a culture of ongoing improvement. When we know which programs have the greatest impact on improving student achievement and closing achievement gaps, California will be better able

to focus limited resources to best serve the kids that need the most help.

SB 603, introduced by Senator Alex Padilla, caps the number of new retail tobacco licenses that may be issued annually and requires tobacco retailers to pay an annual license renewal fee. This bill is particularly important when you consider the fact that cardiovascular disease and cancer are the primary causes of death among Hispanics. Considering the often deadly effects of tobacco use, it is important that we work towards preventing youth tobacco use as well as reduce the availability of tobacco products in our communities.

The third featured bill is SB 194, the California Equity Investment Act, introduced by Senator Dean Florez. This bill will assist disadvantaged unincorporated communities that lack access to basic infrastructure, such as streets, sidewalks, and clean drinking water by creating incentives for the development of local Community Equity Investment Plans by linking state planning funds to the adoption of a local plan of action to identify and address infrastructure deficits and housing inequities in unincorporated communities. SB 194 will also reprioritize existing funding streams to ensure that limited public infrastructure funds are directed to the poorest communities in our state.

These bills, as all other Latino Caucus priority bills, highly impact on our Latino Community and it is important we work together to ensure their success.

Human & Economic Toll From Water Crisis

As California struggles with a third straight year of drought-like conditions, Assembly Member Anna Caballero is calling on state water officials to change the restrictions on the transfer of water from areas that have enough to areas that are facing potential disaster from a lack of water. Assemblymember Caballero says unless water transfer regulations are adjusted, the price of fresh produce will rise, California's unemployment rates will increase, small towns will face crushing economic conditions and drinkable water may not be

available in rural communities. At a State Capitol news conference with other legislators, farmers, farm workers and local water officials, Assemblymember Caballero released a letter to Governor Schwarzenegger calling on his administration to allow flexibility in the transfer of water by adjusting the "place of use designation" that controls who and how water can be transferred. To view an Assembly report on this issue, please visit:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VnNic3GiFUs>

HOPE Latina Action Day

On April 21, 2009, Hispanas Organized for Political Equality (HOPE) celebrates its 20th Anniversary. HOPE has a longstanding commitment to advancing Latinas through education, leadership and advocacy to benefit all communities and the status of women. Latina Action Day is especially significant in this critical time in our history, when our economy is undergoing significant challenges and heated debate is occurring about how to handle our state budget crises and how stimulus funds from Washington will be distributed to communities and programs. With more than 6 million Latinas living in California, it is important that as leaders, attendees answer their “Call to Action” by engaging in the dialogue around key policy issues that will empower their local communities.

Latina Action Day will begin with a march and rally to the Secretary of State’s Office where California Assembly Speaker Karen Bass will discuss the importance of civic engagement and the upcoming May 19th Special Election. That will be followed by a townhall meeting on Proposition 11 where experts will address the impact this redistricting measure will have on Latina representation in electoral politics, and a budget townhall meeting where Legislative Analyst Mac Taylor will discuss the state budget and the regional implications of budget cuts. The day ends with the Latina Leadership Dinner where they honor all Latina Legislators and thank them for their ongoing support of HOPE. For more information on HOPE please visit their website at www.latinas.org.

The 2009 Latino Caucus



WEB ADDRESS

<http://democrats.assembly.ca.gov/LatinoCaucus/>

OTHER WEB RESOURCES

Myspace – www.myspace.com/latinocaucus

Facebook – <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=57405266134&ref=share>

Webalbum – <http://picasaweb.google.com/CA.LatinoCaucus>

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Quote

“We criticize and separate ourselves from the process. We’ve got to jump right in there with both feet.”

Dolores Huerta

2009 Latino Spirit Awards Honorees

Dolores Huerta
Civil Rights Advocate

Jorge Huerta
Outstanding Achievement in Theatre & Arts

Rigoberta Menchú
Human Rights

Ruben Navarrette Jr.
Columnist & Author

Luis Nogales
Business & Philanthropic Achievement

Ellen Ochoa
Public Service & Aerospace Pioneer

Fred Ruiz
Business & Philanthropic Achievement